



BALANCING on submerged rock, an excavator prepares to lift a salvaged millstone onto dry land. Also helping with the operation were Louise Finger (on the rocks) and diver Jason Hallacher, both of DGIF. A second millstone, also pulled up from deeper water, rests at right near the bank. (Kit Huffman photo)

It Begins – Then Stops

Piers Removed As Dam Project Gets Underway

BY KIT HUFFMAN

In a project aimed at restoring the natural habitat and flow of the Maury River at Jordans Point, Mother Nature is having a strong – and not always cooperative – say.

Following record rains in 2018 which prevented a planned October removal of the dam at the Point by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, in conjunction with Lexington, rainy weather let up

just a bit this spring, allowing the project to get underway last Tuesday.

This past weekend, though, proved wet again, and work, which started with constructing an access route and removing eight of 13 railroad piers, as well as salvaging two historic millstones, ceased on Saturday, when the contractor’s big-equipment operator declared he could no longer see the bottom of the river.

Overnight rains on Friday had lifted the river level by about 1 foot. Two ad-

ditional inches of rain Sunday, causing high water at the dam, put the kibosh on taking up the work again early this week. “The dam removal will proceed when the river level comes back down,” said project director Louise Finger on Monday. “I do not have a date for that, of course.”

On April 9, Finger had emailed notice of the start of the project to Lexington City Manager Noah Simon, County



MAURY RIVER users are now warned about in-stream construction at the Jordans Point dam. (all photos by Kit Huffman)



AN EXCAVATOR with Shenandoah Streamworks picks up a large rock from the foundation of a demolished railroad pier. Five piers are left standing for historical interpretation.



NICK BRASH, the engineer who first reported the presence of submerged millstones in 2007, uses a wetsuit and snorkel to pinpoint the artifacts for DGIF.

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Administrator Spencer Suter and Dale Brown of Virginia Military Institute, which owns the piers.

“Though the downstream gauge in Buena Vista showed a spike in flow yesterday,” she wrote, “the river level at the dam is such that our contractor will begin preparing the construction access route to the river today. Depending on river levels later in the week, work will begin on pier removal, causeway construction and dam demolition. The duration of this work will be weather-dependent and will progress as conditions are appropriate.”

That first Tuesday, using an access route made of heavy fabric overlain with coarse gravel, the contractor with Shenandoah Streamworks out of Weyers Cave used a hydraulic hammer to break up two piers. On Wednesday, the hammer broke up six more piers, leaving five standing on the north side of the river for future historical interpretation, as required in the project memorandum of understanding.

Thursday remained sunny and work continued with removal of pier foundations by an excavator and the successful lifting of two millstones from the riverbed downstream from the dam. The stones were first reported by civil engineer Nick Brash of Roanoke, in his 2007 inspection of the dam for the city, following the 2006 drowning at the dam of local youth Charles Volpe. The millstones are thought to have been discarded by the gristmill formerly located on the millrace across the Point from the dam. The millstones might have been redundant after the mill switched to rolling-mill technology in the early 20th century.

As if to complete the circle of his involvement, Brash returned to the scene Thursday to don a wetsuit and

snorkel and assist DGIF diver and assistant fisheries biologist Jason Hallacher in pinpointing the location of the submerged millstones. After the artifacts were located, Brash returned to the riverbank while Hallacher, wearing a full diver’s equipment including oxygen tank, attached a strap and chains to the millstones for them to be pulled out of the water by the excavator. Finger also helped with the removal, entering the accompanying boat and then climbing on the pier foundation to attach and then remove the chain.

The first millstone was found just a few feet downstream from the dam in 8 to 10 feet of water. The second stone was perhaps 20 feet downstream from the dam in about 5 feet of water. The millstones, each scored with lines radiating out from the center, have been placed on dry land at the Point within the project work zone surrounded by orange mesh fence.

A small crowd gathered to observe the work from the restored dam overlook, including several Lexington Council members and the mayor, as well as news media and a volunteer photographer for Historic Lexington Foundation.

On Friday, as demolition of the pier foundations continued, observers included a local fisherman who showed photos of the large bass he’d caught below the dam. He expressed concern about the effect of the demolition on the life cycle of the fish, which he said spawn in the area of the dam and piers during the month of April.

Another observer wondered about the effect of removing the dam on the upcoming Road and River Relay, scheduled for the first Saturday in May.

Whether the dam will actually come down by then, only Mother Nature knows.



ABOVE, the first of two millstones is hoisted out of the Maury River by the contractor’s excavator Thursday. AT LEFT, divers Jason Hallacher (left) and Nick Brash stay in the water as project director Louise Finger attaches hardware for removal of a submerged millstone. BELOW, the excavator drops another rock from a pier foundation into the river, in preparation for a future causeway to the dam for its demolition.





A HYDRAULIC HAMMER (right) and an excavator demolish the 1911 dam at Jordans Point, revealing the timbers of the 1810 crib dam just upstream. The crib dam remnants pose a potential hazard and will be removed soon. For additional photos of the dam demolition, visit [The News-Gazette's website](#). (Kit Huffman photo)

One Dam Down

River Changes As Crib Dam Study Starts

BY KIT HUFFMAN

After three days of the rhythmic pounding of a rock hammer and the noisy scrapings and splashes of an excavator, the 108-year-old concrete and stone-aggregate dam across the Maury River at Jordans Point has been taken apart and removed.

Using a hydraulic hammer and giant excavator, both mounted on track hoes allowing the equipment to “wade” into the river

on a temporary stone causeway, Shenandoah Streamworks, contractors with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, began the work last Thursday afternoon.

By the end of Saturday, “about 99 percent” of the planned demolition was complete, leaving just some fine-tuning of the remnant portion on the southern bank still to be done, reported Louise Finger, project director and VDGIF stream restoration biologist, in an up-

date Monday. The concrete/aggregate dam material was to be removed from the area early this week.

Also last Saturday, accumulated sediment at the entrance of the millrace was excavated to allow for water to enter the millrace as frequently as possible, said Finger.

Removing the concrete dam exposed rem-

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ABOVE, a male blue gill guards his nest in increasingly shallow water upstream from the demolished dam at Jordans Point on Friday. Some local fishermen say the dam should not have come down during the spawning season. AT RIGHT, demolition of the dam at Jordans Point proceeds quickly on Friday. (Kit Huffman photos)



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nants of a wooden crib dam, believed to date from 1810, in the channel immediately upstream, the project director noted. “The crib dam is clearly compromised, with water flowing through it in places and loose timbers and metal spikes exposed,” she said. “Despite this, it is still maintaining several feet of water-surface elevation in the upstream channel.”

In accordance with the historic resources memorandum of agreement among the city of Lexington, Virginia State Historic Preservation Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the previously unrecorded crib dam is being documented by the architectural historian who was on-site to document the Jordans Point dam removal, Finger said.

The documentation will be submitted to historic preservation office shortly for review and approval. Also per the MOA stipulations, some of the salvaged crib dam timbers will be stored by the city for potential interpretive use by the Miller’s House Museum or Historic Lexington Foundation.

Asked when the crib dam remnants will be removed from the river, Finger said they presented a hazard and should be taken out as soon as possible.

“There are compelling health and safety concerns with the crib dam in its current state, with large metal spikes exposed, timbers unsecured and missing, and water flowing through the structure in places,” she said told The News-Gazette yesterday. “Thus the urgency in proceeding without delay.”

She said her agency hoped to receive approval to move forward with removal of the remnant timbers “shortly,” as the documentation providing evidence that such an effort is underway has been submitted to the Department of Historic Resources. “That documentation and research will continue as the timbers are removed and more information is revealed,” she said.

‘It’s A Moment’

The project, proposed by VDGIF in 2017 as a riverine-restoration and dam-removal project and approved by Lexington City Council that summer and reaffirmed last fall, was on deck to start in December, but postponed over the winter because of continued rainy weather and high water flows.

Work finally got underway last month, with the Tuesday, April 9, building of a temporary access road along the northeast side of Jordans Point Park and down to the river. The planned removal of eight of 13 railroad piers downstream from the dam, leaving five for historical interpretation, started the next day and continued through Friday.

Thursday, April 11, was a red-letter day for historical salvage – and for the many interested spectators watching from the bridge-abutment overlook – when two submerged millstones were located by divers and extricated from the river by the excavator, which placed them on dry land on the Point. One of the millstones has been displayed outside the Miller’s House Museum and the other will go to the Frontier Culture Museum in Staunton for display outside their future replica gristmill.

Also in the second week of April, the excavator started building up the causeway for a shallower approach to the downstream side of the dam. However, both pier demolition and causeway construction were halted that Saturday, as storms raised the river to an unsafe level for the equipment.

In the first week of May, the excavator returned to the river to complete demolition of the pier foundations and construction of the causeway. Once again, heavy weekend rain halted the work until last week, when the contractor was called back to the job, to demolish the dam itself.

A few who came to Jordans Point last week to observe the dam demolition were happy with the project, saying it will make for a healthier river, but others were displeased, even angry.

For over 200 years, a dam at the Point had impounded a long stretch of the river upstream, creating deep water and a lake-like

effect popular with boaters, fishermen and others, who simply liked its appearance.

For historians and preservationists, the dam was important for channeling water into the millrace, originally to power industries once located on the Point. Without water preserving certain timbers at the base of the rock walls of the millrace, the preservationist said, the timbers will rot and their history disappear.

“People don’t like change in general, and this is a lot of change,” one visitor to the Point remarked last week.

“We can call it the Maury mud banks now,” said another, indicating the opposite bank,

Reactions to videos posted on Facebook were mostly negative, though a few expressed support of the dam removal.

East Lexington property owners said the value of their homes dropped after the demolition of the dam was announced.

On Friday evening, a stroll to the canoe/kayak takeout at the west tip of the Point revealed muddy river approaches and an empty channel leading to the millrace intake, its culvert blocked with mud and trash. By Saturday noon, following VDGIF’s excavation at the intake, water was flowing gently into the culvert and millrace.

Maral Kalbian, an architectural historian contracted with the DGIF to document the project, said Friday that she would photograph everything revealed by the demolition and receding waters. For example, she indicated the layers of the concrete cap on the dam, now chipped away by the rock hammer, and the composition of the dam itself, its downstream wall now seen for the first time as the water level dropped. She was “curious” about the wood debris upstream from the dam, as “possibly part of an old crib dam,” and said she would photograph and document it all for her report to VDGIF, as set forth in the MOA. She said the report will be made available to the public.

Also at the dam on Friday was local contractor and fisherman Anthony Lipscomb, who was anguished over the fate of fish now in their spawning season above the dam. He pointed to a dozen circular fish beds, or “nests,” made by the fish near the river bank before the demolition, when the water was several feet deeper. He said the fish won’t leave the beds, even though the water was receding, and that they will probably die at the site. There are hundreds of similar fish beds lining the bank upstream, he said, which would also be left high and dry. He said that the VDGIF, as the fisheries department, should have honored the spawning season and undertaken the project at another time.

Local resident Darrell Plogger took citizen action early Saturday by catching a 14-inch smallmouth bass stranded in a pool in the millrace and releasing the fish into the river. He’d heard that two women had netted out some carp from the millrace previously. On Sunday, when he returned to the millrace, he could hear the sound of running water.

A local veteran at the dam site observed that people will still be able to boat in the river, but it will be a “very different experience.” Searching for something positive to say about the lowered water level upstream, he said that long-submerged logs that will now surface will be “very valuable,” after absorbing chemicals from the river water and taking on different colors.

Visiting the Point on Sunday, Lorna Smith, a Lexington native who works in Richmond, said that her ancestor, Nathaniel Brooke Rees, had helped design one of the early wooden bridges at the Point. Smith, who considers herself an amateur preservationist, was concerned about the wooden timbers in the millrace that could now be exposed to air and subject to rot.

“The town has spent so much money to preserve the area – it’s a big deal,” she said. “I recognize that things change, but I hope there’s a plan to integrate, to have a master plan to consider every aspect of the Point.

“It’s a moment,” she continued. “It’s sad to see it (the dam) destroyed. I understand mitigating risks (the hazardous dam) but you have to integrate it with all the other intents, perspectives and filters, and who moderates that?”

Jay Gilliam, who founded the local branch of the Izaak Walton League, commented that “Removal of the dam will make the river healthier biologically. It will be a better fishery.”

He hoped that there will be an effort to re-vegetate the exposed sections of river bank with, for example, warm-season grasses that will allow native plants to come in naturally, instead of invasives like honeysuckle and Russian olive.

On Sunday, part of the Memorial Weekend holiday, children, adults and dogs were enjoying the water off the Point’s landing beach, swimming or paddling canoes, kayaks and paddle boards. One family of three, who had had launched their canoe from Beans Bottom, said they’d stayed afloat the entire distance, with sufficient water depth following the dam’s removal. In fact, they’d discovered new pools and riffle-runs in the river, they said.

However, Dick Halseth, president of the Miller’s House Museum, remained concerned about the millrace, saying that water there could disappear altogether once the crib dam remnants are removed.

He’d spoken with project director Finger on Friday, when he’d concluded by telling her that he would “make the best of what we’ve got.”

“But the process was flawed,” he insisted.

He said he’d learned from Finger that the excavator had dug down to bedrock at the millrace intake, and that that MOA on the project “didn’t guarantee flow (into the millrace) at all times.”

He doesn’t want the millrace to run dry, which would endanger the wooden timbers, but even more, he doesn’t want the millrace to have pools of standing water, which will attract breeding mosquitoes. “That would really plague visitors to Jordans Point,” he said.

He’s had a bright idea, which is to install a pump near the top of the millrace to keep river water flowing into the millrace. His wife, Mary Harvey Halseth, has an even brighter idea, to power the pump with solar panels – a fine, 21st century solution to preserve a 19th century historical site.

The start of the dam demolition last Thursday occurred 13 years and one month, to the day, after the drowning death of 16-year-old Charles Volpe, who was swept over the dam and trapped in its deadly hydraulics on April 23, 2006.

Former Lexington City Manager Jon Ellestad, who came to the site on Friday, provided a partial timeline of his experience with the dam, recalling that the dam hardly registered with the city before the teenager’s death.

The dam was deeded to Lexington by the Virginia Public Service Authority in 1940, along with the rest of Jordans Point, he noted. After Volpe’s death, the city put up warning signs along the bank and strung a series of buoys across the river above the dam. In 2007, Lexington commissioned a study of the dam, which found numerous cracks, seeps and voids and the shifting of some sections downstream. The estimated cost of repairing the dam was \$2.5 to 3 million.

The city, as owner of the dam, was sued by Volpe’s family, and officials were advised by the city attorneys to take no major action on the dam until the lawsuit was resolved, Ellestad recalled. The first trial, in 2009, resulted in a hung jury, and the second, in 2012, found for the plaintiff and awarded \$100,000 to the late teenager’s mother, payable by the city.

Meanwhile, the economic downturn of 2008-09 had occurred, Ellestad recalled, and the city was cutting back and “not spending anything.” At the same time, putting more pressure on the city, the dam had come under state control, since criteria for state oversight had been changed to include dams only 10 feet high. By now nearing retirement, Ellestad handed off the problem of the dam to his successor, Noah Simon, who arrived in October 2014.

Simon, whose last day in Lexington was April 30, before he departed for a new job in Texas, helped oversee the first part of the demolition, the removal of the railroad piers.



AT LEFT, demolition equipment is reflected in the still-deep waters above the Jordans Point dam on Thursday. ABOVE, with newly exposed river bank in the background, a Lexington couple heads upstream from Jordans Point Sunday on their paddleboards. (Kit Huffman photos)



TIMBERS from the old crib dam at Jordans Point are removed last Wednesday, as project director Louise Finger of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (right) and architectural historians Dan Pezzoni (center) and Maral Kalbian look on. (Kit Huffman photo)

Dams All Gone

More Pieces Of History Uncovered As Project Concludes

BY KIT HUFFMAN

The dam-removal project at Jordans Point – work that turned out to require taking out two adjoining dams from different eras, instead of one – wrapped up this week.

In an update Monday, project director Louise Finger of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries reported that the contractor, Shenandoah Streamworks, had removed the remaining concrete pieces (remnants from the later, 1911 dam) from



THE MAURY RIVER runs unimpeded through the former dam site at Jordans Point. The old fish dam and some former railroad piers remain near the far shore. (Kit Huffman photo)



A SUBMERGED timber off the beach near the millrace intake shows distinctive markings, suggesting construction. (Ronnie Hathaway photo)



TIMBERS in the old crib dam at Jordans Point, seen in this photo from the north bank of the river, are tagged for salvaging and possible future reconstruction. (photo courtesy of VDGIF)

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the river that day. On Tuesday, the contractor planned to remove the temporary construction access road, with the hope of being completely out of the park by today, Wednesday.

Also on Monday, the contractor's excavator smoothed the riverbank leading down to the Maury just upstream from the former dam, for easier public access. By noon that day, Finger herself was flinging grass seed over the smoothed riverbank and spreading straw – part of an improvement that was not part of the official project, she said, but a way to help the public enjoy their new river access.

Overall, she assessed the removal of the railroad bridge piers, the concrete dam and the crib dam as having gone “very smoothly.”

“Shenandoah Streamworks worked with precision and patience to facilitate the architectural historians’ documentation of the (estimated 1810) crib dam prior to removal and to carefully salvage the timbers selected by the historians,” she said. “These timbers were tagged and labeled and are currently being stored at the city’s public works yard for potential interpretive use.”

The railroad piers were removed in two sessions interrupted by high river flow, one beginning on April 10 and another on May 2; the concrete dam came down on May 23-25; and the crib dam was removed May 29-30, with timber removal continuing through the end of the week.

Last Thursday, May 30, local timber framer and furniture maker Mez Welch requested, and was given, about 10 of the timbers which had not been selected by the historians. He planned to dry out the timbers and then use them for possible commemorative pieces. He was assisted by fellow timber framer Ross Beebe.

Most of the timbers, however, were loaded into a large truck for removal and probable disposal.

In her summary, Finger also commented on a less favorable outcome of the dam removal – the loss of water flow into the Point’s historic millrace.

“Prior to this project moving forward, it was acknowledged by the lead federal agency, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service – and the State

Historic Preservation Office concurred – that there would be impacts to the millrace, as without the dam, there would not be constant flow,” she recalled. “This is one of the reasons that the Section 106 MOA was developed and mitigation measures stipulated therein. The MOA stated that the millrace channel between the river and the head gate would be excavated to match the elevation of the head gate. Any further or deeper digging would have no effect since the head gate elevation determines at what level water will enter the millrace.”

As required by the MOA, she reported, the contractor excavated the accumulated sediment down to bedrock in the millrace entry channel, and the elevation of the bedrock there was found to be the same as the elevation of the head gate for the millrace.

This means that unless the level of the river rises above that of the bedrock – which it has not done since the crib dam was removed last week – the millrace will run dry.

Last Friday, Miller’s House Museum president Richard Halseth took a photo of exposed wooden timbers from the old gauge dock at the millrace. These timbers are now expected to rot, no longer being preserved by water.

Finger listed other mitigation efforts required by the MOA, most now accomplished. These include documenting at the “intensive level” the dam removal and any associated previously unrecorded structures (like the crib dam), salvaging some of the crib dam timbers, updating the Jordans Point dam documentation to include additional information about the fish ladder, leaving remnant portions of the dam on both sides of the river, recovering the two millstones in the dam pool for interpretive use, and installing interpretive signs about the fish ladder and the upstream end of the millrace.

She noted that the area in the vicinity of the dam has been “graded to reflect the appropriate stream dimensions, with the expectation that the river will adjust in the coming months and years to its renewed natural state.”

“As you have probably seen,” she concluded, “people have been fishing and paddling and wading and

swimming all along the previously impounded reach as well as through the riffle that was a dam just a week ago. We understand that the city will be developing a master plan for the park and that plan will likely include provisions to expand on that extensive usage by the public.”

In a press release from VDGIF last Saturday, Secretary of Natural Resources Matthew J. Strickler commented, “As a native of Lexington and Rockbridge County, I could not be more excited to see this stretch of the Maury River return to its natural state. Removing dams like the one at Jordans Point that no longer serve a purpose is a priority as we look to improve fish habitat and increase recreational opportunities on Virginia rivers.”

The release concludes, “This effort has returned the river to a free-flowing system with diverse pool and riffle habitat, opened upstream fish passage, removed the mandatory portage and improved public safety in city-owned Jordans Point Park. In short order, the river will adjust to its renewed condition with vegetation re-establishing on the banks; insects, fish, and mussel communities will flourish; and the public can safely enjoy the beauty of the river.”

Unexpected Finds

While previously known to exist, and indeed partly visible through the water at lower river levels, the size of the remaining crib dam was unexpected.

“We knew the old crib dam was there under the water upstream of the dam, but the extent of it was a surprise,” said architectural historian Maral Kalbian last week. “Before the concrete dam was taken down, we couldn’t see it. It was clear by mid-day Friday (May 24) that there was more to it.”

She and local historic preservationist Dan Pezzoni worked together to document the crib dam and other historic artifacts at the site. “Dan and I have a long history of working on projects together,” she explained.

Kalbian said she’d worked through Memorial Day to prepare her report on what had been revealed thus far in the dam demolition project, including the crib dam, in order to submit the report as soon as possible to DHR. After the report was

submitted, the DHR promptly gave permission for the crib dam’s removal last Wednesday.

Getting the crib dam remnants out of the river as soon as possible was important, Kalbian and Finger each said, because the structure bristled with spikes and other hardware, as well as the sharp ends of the timbers itself, posing a danger to any possible swimmers or boaters who might (at that time illegally) approach the dam.

Leafing through her book entitled “Lefil’s Construction of Mill Dams,” the historian noted that crib dams were built “all over (the country).” Not ready yet to provide a certain date for the crib dam, she said it appeared there were different repairs to the dam, made at different times, and parts of the crib dam were later removed to make way for the newer concrete dam in front of it downstream.

She noted that red cedar, the material for the timbers, was “readily available here.”

The historian also talked about how she’d researched and determined the precise date for the later concrete dam. She’d gone online, scanning the digitized files of local newspapers in “Chronicling of America” available through the Library of Congress. She recalled the “eureka” moment of finding the short piece under the headline “East Lexington Notes” in the Aug. 16, 1911, edition of the Lexington Gazette. The piece read, “Work on the concrete dam across North River at Moses’ Mill is progressing nicely, and when completed will be a great improvement as well as a source of increased water supply.”

The article begs the question of a great improvement over what, though that probably referred to the old crib dam.

Kalbian then found a corroborating article, dated Aug. 30, 1911, also from the Lexington Gazette: “A heavy rain last night and showers today have done much to break the drought. North River was tolerably full this morning. The coffer dam at Moses’ Mill, used in connection with building a new concrete dam, was washed away.”

According to an online site, a cofferdam is a structure that retains water and allows a work area to be

dewatered so that crews can pour concrete, excavate, repair or weld.

Kalbian and Pezzoni will prepare a report to be published on the website of the Department of Historic Resources and to be directly shared with stakeholders according to the MOA, including the Miller’s House Museum and other groups and individuals.

Among many visitors to the site last week was Bo Camden, 77, a retired painter, who said he’d fished a hole below the dam for 70 years. He’d been given a large splintered piece of the old crib dam to take home, as a souvenir, which he said he’d hand down to his grandchildren. “I never knew the crib dam was in there,” he remarked.

A hot Friday afternoon at the western tip of the Point found Lexington public works staff improving the landscaping between the playing field and the parking lot. They’d also driven down to the newly exposed rocky beach and picked up metal debris hazardous to the public, including fence posts and fishing lures and hooks.

Wading knee-deep in the river off the beach were Ronnie Hathaway and his son, Blake of Mobile, Ala., who discovered seemingly connected submerged timbers that stretched across the width of the river. In this area they also found a long iron spike and a broken cast-iron peg. They hauled onto the beach a fragment of the submerged timber, complete with another iron spike.

Halseth, of the Miller’s House Museum, was alerted to the submerged timbers and artifacts, whose purpose is not presently known. The Hathaways said they would give the artifacts to Halseth for the museum. Halseth also informed Finger, who responded that whatever the structure is, it doesn’t come within the scope of the VDGIF project.

On Monday afternoon, Halseth stopped by the beach and saw someone trying to extract the spike from the beached timber. “I yelled at him to stop as it is state property and he could get in trouble,” Halseth reported. “It would be good to discourage looting of valuable artifacts.”



A FEW TIMBERS were all that remained of the old crib dam late last week. (Kit Huffman photo)



AN EXCAVATOR removes rock from the base of the former crib dam last week. (Kit Huffman photo)



TIMBERS from the 1800s crib dam lie on the bank after being removed from the Maury River last week. (Kit Huffman photo)



THE MEMORIAL to Charles Volpe, who died at the Jordans Point dam in 2006, was surrounded by caution tape during the dam removal project. (Kit Huffman photo)



EXPOSED banks can be seen in this view of the Maury River from the western end of Jordans Point. (Kit Huffman photo)

Re-vegetation Project Starting For Riverbanks

BY KIT HUFFMAN

A community-wide volunteer effort is being organized to re-vegetate riverbanks along the Maury that have been exposed by the lower water following removal of the dams at Jordans Point.

Coordinating the planting effort, which will take place this fall, is the Rockbridge Area Conservation Council, with leadership from board member Paul Bryant. Bryant's company, Virginia Reforestation LLC, has a focus on growing and planting native trees to improve water quality in the Shenandoah Valley. The nonprofit company will donate the trees for the Maury riverbank project.

Several other organizations are also partnering with RACC for the project, including Boxerwood Gardens, the environmental committee of 50 Ways Rockbridge and the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners, said RACC Executive Director Barbara Walsh. The groups held a planning meeting with RACC on Monday.

RACC has also sent a letter to riverside property owners upstream from the former dams, hoping to enlist their help in the plantings. RACC is also coordinating with Louise Finger of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, director of the dam-removal and river restoration project.

RACC will be working this summer to organize the project and assess the areas to be planted, said Walsh. She was enthusiastic about the native species to be planted, including black willow, pin oak, river birch, native dogwood and black walnut. The plantings themselves will take place in October, with some of the banks to be accessed from the river itself.

New Master Plan On Horizon For Park

BY KIT HUFFMAN

Twenty-one years after hiring a consultant to draw up the first master plan for Jordans Point Park, Lexington City Council is on the brink of selecting another firm to design a new master plan for the park.

A new plan is needed because the removal of the dam at the park will result, in the words of the city's request for qualifications for planning and design firms, in "a new relationship between the Maury River and Jordans Point Park."

On the agenda for Council's meeting tomorrow night, Thursday, is a recommendation by Arne Glaeser, director of planning and development, that Council prepare to rank two selected firms proposing to create a conceptual design for the park.

As Glaeser states in his background piece to Council, "The primary need for a new park master plan stems from the removal of the existing Jordan's Point dam. Without the impoundment and slack water upstream of the dam, the park land area will increase marginally and the intention of the park master plan is to prepare for the new relationship between the Maury River and Jordan's Point Park."

The city's five-page RFQ was issued last winter and answered by nine firms, of which four were selected for presentations in March. The selection committee consisted of finance director Gary Swink, public works director Jeff Martone, public information officer Meredith Warfield and Glaeser. The committee is now recommending the top two firms for ranking by Council, with a contract to be negotiated with the highest ranked firm.

Glaeser will request that Council invite both firms to make public presen-

tations to Council at a work session on Thursday, June 20.

The new Jordans Point Park master plan is included in the current fiscal year budget, with \$75,000 budgeted for the study, with another \$50,000 in the FY20 for the first phase of implementing the plan.

The RFQ is a visioning document presenting the city's goals for the park. It begins, "It is the city's desire to improve this recreational asset and front door to our community. Jordan's Point Park is approximately 5.86 acres in size and it currently contains the Miller's House Museum, historic millrace, a picnic shelter, interpretative signage, canal boat exhibit, restrooms, river overlook (on an old covered bridge abutment), parking, and connection to the Chessie Nature Trail and the Woods Creek Trail."

The RFQ continues, "Jordan's Point Park is envisioned as a park with a focus on both the heritage of Jordan's Point and the scenic Maury River, while promoting both visual enhancement and a sense of identity. Jordan's Point Park is the city's largest recreational park and this asset should provide users of all ages with publicly accessible space for leisure activities, socializing, and enjoying natural and designed landscapes, but also provide access to the Woods Creek and Chessie Nature Trails for walking, jogging, or biking.

"The space should be developed in a way that makes it usable for both informal and programmed events that can incorporate both performing and visual arts with the Maury River as a backdrop. Any design must incorporate the existing cultural and heritage assets of the park including the Miller's House and the historic mill race. Additionally, any design must improve water access to the Maury River, bike and pedestrian access to and through the park, and signage

while considering the existing natural habitat, ball field, and other amenities. Lexington desires a highly active multi-use gathering and civic space for all citizens and visitors to enjoy."

The selected firm must participate in at least six public or agency review meetings to gauge public ideas and opinions to be incorporated into the master plan, when feasible. The firm is also asked to identify phases for construction and potential sources of funding. The firm will be asked to create the new park master plan within nine months.

Commenting on the process last week, Glaeser said that all four firms reviewed by the selection committee were experienced. He identified the two firms recommended for ranking by Council as LPDA, which he said did previous planning work for the park, and the Timmons Group. He said that a new master plan was needed to "refresh" the park as well as to respond to changes made by the dam removal.

The first design consultant for Jordans Point Park was Carlton Abbott, hired by City Council in October 1998. The park was to be made possible by the removal of the public wastewater treatment plant, for the previous four decades located on the current playing field at the park. The plant was removed in January 2000, having been replaced by a new facility about half a mile downstream, on property off Lincoln Road.

Abbott had two decades earlier designed the Woods Creek Trail. In his 1975 report on that project, he wrote "VMI Island (Jordans Point) has great physical and historical interest and in some sense it is the 'jewel' of the proposed Woods Creek Park project. ... Although the island has long [been] abandoned by industry, there does remain a splendid opportunity for creation and some historical interpretation."